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SUBJECT: UNSC MINISTERIAL-LEVEL MEETING ON THE MIDDLE EAST

¶1. (SBU) This is an action message. Please see paragraphs three and four. USUN should seek to delay by several weeks, if possible, a meeting of the Security Council at the Ministerial level proposed by Saudi Arabia and the Arab Group to discuss the issue of Israeli settlements. If a meeting is unavoidable, USUN should seek to minimize its impact and to deter any kind of product coming out of it. It should also seek to expand the agenda of the meeting to include a balanced consideration of all issues, along the lines of our approach at monthly briefings on the situation in the Middle East. Mission is authorized to draw from the points in para 4 below in its presentation at a Council session. Note: Info addressees in Arab League posts will receive instructions septel on approaching host governments on this matter.

¶2. (SBU) Background. On September 19, the presidency of the Security Council distributed to the UN Missions of the Quartet and Libya a letter from Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal on behalf of the Arab League requesting a Ministerial-level meeting of the Security Council to discuss the issue of Israeli settlement activity. The letter, which the Presidency subsequently distributed to all UNSC members on September 22, claimed that this special meeting would "save the peace process and the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli negotiations from failure." It went on to assert that Israel's ongoing settlement activities "pre-empt the current negotiations and render them meaningless." In UNSC consultations on the afternoon of September 22, despite USUN's best efforts to deflect this request, the consensus of other members was that a session should be held. However, several other missions - notably Belgium, France and the UK, joined the U.S. in noting that any UNSC meeting should include the full range of issues, not merely the question of Israeli settlement activity. No final decision on the timing or agenda for a meeting were taken. The Presidency is now reportedly in the process of conferring individually with UNSC missions with a view to holding a meeting, either late this week or early next.

¶3. (SBU) Action request. USUN should seek to delay the convening of a previously-unscheduled UNSC Ministerial meeting proposed by Saudi Arabia and the Arab Group for as long as practical, ideally by several weeks, working with the Council Presidency and like-minded states to effect this delay. Mission should seek to expand the agenda of the meeting to include a balanced consideration of all issues, along the lines of our approach at monthly briefings on the situation in the Middle East. Items that should be included in the discussion -- whether USUN is able to have them formally included in the agenda or not -- are listed at paragraph four. Core points for the U.S. presentation at the meeting, if one is held, are at paragraph five.

¶4. (U) In addition to a discussion on Israeli settlement activity requested by Saudi Arabia and the Arab League,

any Ministerial-level meeting on the situation in the Middle East should also cover the following topics:

- the need for both sides to fulfill all their obligations under the Roadmap;
- a permanent end to attacks targeting civilians, and the dismantlement of terrorist infrastructure;
- the need for the Palestinian Authority to fulfill its commitment to fight terrorism and to accelerate steps to rebuild and refocus its security apparatus;
- progress in the transfer of security responsibilities from Israel to the Palestinian Authority in support of the PA's efforts to fight terrorism, and to facilitate the delivery of security assistance to the Palestinian Authority;
- the need for all regional states to cut off public and private funding and all other forms of support for groups supporting and engaging in violence and terrorism;
- the importance of all states, international organizations and specialized agencies to assist in the development of the Palestinian Authority and its capacity to fight terror;
- the efforts of Egypt and the Arab League to help restore calm in Gaza in a manner that would provide security to all Palestinians and Israelis; ensure the controlled and sustained opening of the Gaza crossings for humanitarian reasons and commercial flows; support the legitimate PA government's authority throughout its territory; and work towards conditions that would permit implementation of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

15. (U) Begin points for a U.S. presentation at a possible UNSC Ministerial-level meeting:

- [Complimentary Opening]
- We thank the Arab League and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their interest in this issue. The Council last met to discuss these matters on September 18. Since then, there have been no major developments on the ground.
- Secretary Rice's intense personal engagement on this issue demonstrates our commitment to a peaceful, two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Secretary last traveled to Jerusalem and Ramallah on August 26 for tri-lateral talks, as she has almost every month since the conference in Annapolis last November. Here in New York, she has met with... [Note: USUN to fill in to reflect key meetings that have occurred.]
- The United States remains strongly committed to achieving a peace agreement. I would like to be absolutely clear on this point: The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian talks are serious and substantive, and are addressing all issues, without exception. The talks remain fully confidential at the request of both parties, the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, a request that we believe must be respected.
- The United States thus does not share the rather dismissive view expressed in the September 16 Saudi letter to the Council Presidency that the current negotiations are "meaningless." As is well known, both parties are continuing the negotiations with great intensity. This is a reflection of the talks' seriousness, and also a great credit to the Palestinian and Israeli officials who are persevering in the cause of peace despite the great challenges and criticisms they face.
- [Note: One or more points on the September 26 Quartet

meeting should go here. The substance would depend on whether or not the public Ministerial session is taking place before or after September 26.]

-- Separately, Israel and Syria are continuing indirect peace talks, for which we are appreciative of Turkey's facilitation. While we welcome this effort, we remain deeply concerned with Syria's open support for terrorist groups, such as Hizballah; its role as a transit point for foreign terrorists entering Iraq; and the shipment of weapons across the Syrian border into Lebanon which serves to rearm terrorists. The August 25 report of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team shows no progress at all over the past two years on interdicting arms smuggling across this border, concluding that Lebanon's borders are as penetrable now as was the case over a year ago.

-- We strongly support the Lebanese Government and its Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces. The international community must stand with Lebanon's government to insist on the authority of the state and the illegitimacy of armed groups, including Hizballah, that undermine the government's authority and the resolutions of this Council. Two years after the conflict instigated by Hizballah, this remains the most serious matter for the Council to follow with regard to its duty to safeguard international peace and security in the region. As provided in resolution 1701, there must be no unauthorized weapons in Lebanon.

-- We condemn efforts by any armed group to usurp the lawful authority of legitimate government activities via violence and terrorism. We strongly condemn Hamas' actions to usurp the lawful authority of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, including the replacement of public sector workers with Hamas sympathizers and the closing of non-governmental organizations, thereby proscribing the delivery of humanitarian assistance from the UN and others, and the threat that terrorist rocket attacks could resume from Gaza into Israel at any time. The Quartet's principles remain determinative for Hamas' recognition and involvement in the peace process: renunciation of violence and terror; recognition of Israel; and acceptance of previous agreements between the parties.

-- Sincere efforts to crack down on terrorism and to offer genuine alternatives can and do have a significant positive impact despite the existence of many other problems. The progress the Palestinian Authority is making in Jenin, for example - as Palestinian security forces gradually assume greater responsibility to uphold law and order, and as a normal day-to-day activity is restored - stands in clear contrast to the situation in Gaza and in Lebanon.

-- Support for and acceptance of terrorist groups - via public and private funding from states in the region, and the shipment of illicit weapons and materiel across international borders in violation of UN resolutions - has had, in comparison to any other element, the greatest destabilizing effect on the parties, both Arab and Israeli. It is the most corrosive factor on the prospects for a comprehensive and lasting peace. As President Bush expressed in his address to the General Assembly on September 23, no cause can justify the innocent taking of human life.

-- As we heard at Monday's Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting, Palestinian capacity building is another essential element to bringing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end. Nevertheless, the Palestinian Authority remains in dire straits financially and urgently needs additional international support. Total U.S. assistance to the Palestinians in 2008 will surpass our pledged level of \$555 million, including \$264 million in project assistance, \$150 million in direct budget support, and \$184.6 million for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to which the

United States is the largest bilateral donor.

-- Recently, the U.S. Congress approved an additional \$150 million in direct budgetary assistance during fiscal year 2009, which starts October 1, and \$50 million in project assistance. We call on other countries, particularly in the Arab world, to join us in increasing their support to the Palestinian Authority, and for those countries interested in peace who have not yet contributed or fulfilled their pledges to do so.

-- We call on Israel to freeze its settlement activity and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, consistent with its Roadmap obligations. We remain concerned that the continuation of this activity can create a negative effect on the environment for negotiations.

-- Finally, we call on the Arab states to reach out to Israel, work towards the normalization of relations, and demonstrate in both word and deed that Israel and its people have a permanent place in the Middle East. As President Bush has noted, these are vital steps towards the comprehensive peace we all seek.

End points.

16. (U) Minimize considered.
RICE